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ABSTRACT

This practicum was designed to provide a setting where negative attitudes toward reading in eight eighth-grade literature students (in a small private school in a large southeastern city) would be modified. The practicum aimed to provide students with regular opportunities for successful experiences in reading, and to promote the enjoyment of reading. In this individualized reading program, students chose their own reading materials and read during and outside of class. They responded to their reading in a journal, and the teacher replied. Each class period consisted of a teacher-directed mini-lesson covering topics of theme and genre, an independent reading time of about 20 minutes, and a group evaluation for the last few minutes. Students' grades were based on daily averages, frequency and depth of response in journal entries, and progress made toward personal reading goals. Results of the practicum were positive. After some initial hesitation, students responded enthusiastically to assuming more control over their learning through choosing their own reading material, responding to it, and setting personal reading goals. The Estes Survey of Reading Attitude was administered in the fall and in the spring, and showed positive gains in reading attitude. (Two tables of data are included, and 37 references are attached. Four appendixes contain interview questions for the English department head, class guidelines, mini-lesson topics, and a student evaluation form.) (SR)

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Modifying Negative Attitudes Toward Reading of Eighth-Grade Literature Students Through an Individualized Reading Program

by

Cynthia J. Johnston

Cluster XXVII

A Practicum II Report Presented to the Ed. D. Program
in Early and Middle Childhood
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

NOVA UNIVERSITY

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PRACTICUM APPROVAL SHEET

This practicum took place as described.

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June 13, 1990
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This practicum report was submitted by Cynthia J. Johnston under the direction of the adviser listed below. It was submitted to the Ed.D. Program in Early and Middle Childhood and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova University.

Approved:

Aug 5 1990
Date of Final Approval of Report

Adviser

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ABSTRACT

Modifying Negative Attitudes Toward Reading in Eighth-Grade Literature Students Through an Individualized Reading Program. Johnston, Cynthia J., 1990: Practicum Report, Nova University, Ed.D. Program in Early and Middle Childhood. Descriptors: Reading Attitudes/ Reading Improvement/ Independent Reading/ Reading Motivation/ Individualized Reading/ Journal Writing/ Reading Writing Relationship.

This practicum was designed to provide a setting where negative attitudes toward reading in some eighth-grade literature students would be modified. The first goal of this practicum was that members of the eighth-grade literature class will have regular opportunities for successful experiences in reading. Since reading for enjoyment usually means having a positive attitude toward reading, a second goal for this practicum was that members of the eighth-grade reading class will enjoy reading this year.

The author presented an individualized reading program as the curriculum for the eighth-grade literature class. Students chose their own reading materials and read during and outside class. They responded to their reading through regular letters to the teacher written in a journal to which the teacher replied. Each class period consisted of a teacher-directed mini-lesson covering topics of theme and genre, an independent reading time of about 20 minutes, and a group evaluation for the last few minutes. Students' grades were based on daily averages, frequency and depth of response in journal entries, and progress made toward personal reading goals.

The results of the practicum were positive. After some initial hesitation, the students responded enthusiastically to assuming more control over their learning through choosing their own reading material, responding to it and setting personal reading goals. Their negative attitudes toward reading were modified. The Estes Survey of Reading Attitude was administered in the fall and in the spring. Scores were compared, showing positive gains.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Description of Community

A rapidly growing city in the southeastern United States was the setting for this practicum. A deep water port, this city supports an active shipping industry which is fed by the citrus and phosphate industries. Although one of the most industrialized cities in the state, this city has become a financial center and attracts tourists as well.

The city covers about 150 square miles, including nearly 65 square miles of inland water. Much of the city has been built on islands and peninsulas. Due to its strategic geographic location, the city is the location of a large and active military base. A population of 287,917 based on figures given in the 1990 State Estimates of Population lives within city limits. The surrounding county has about 850,000 residents.

One of the largest public school systems in the United States serves the students of the metropolitan area. Private and parochial schools are available to meet religious preferences and special needs of most families.

The school in which this practicum took place is located in an old, established urban neighborhood. This is a highly desirable place to live since it is conveniently located near the downtown business district, shopping and services, and schools to serve every child's educational needs. Housing is available but often at higher prices than in suburban areas.

The Writer's Work Setting

The writer's school is a small, private, coeducational day school located in the

heart of the neighborhood, adjacent to the public junior high school, an elementary school, and the neighborhood recreational facilities. About 400 students in grades kindergarten through eight attend this school. The lower school contains students in grades kindergarten through five, while the upper school consists of grades six through eight.

Students attend this school from all over the metropolitan area. It is known to be an academically rigorous school and admission is highly prized by some parents. Since it is a private school, some students are from affluent families but entrance testing determines admission. An extensive program of financial assistance ensures that any qualified student may attend the school.

The school has been in existence for less than 30 years. Founded originally as a parish day school, it grew and developed a reputation as an excellent primary and middle school. Although still connected with a particular denomination, the school has grown to be independent of its parish ties. About 11% of the children of parishioners attend the school. The school is no longer a parochial school in the sense of belonging to a parish. Within this religious denomination there exists a strong tradition of excellent schools dating back to the days of Colonial America. The schools are independent, keeping denominational affiliation, but not necessarily tied to a specific parish.

Along with a non-discriminatory admissions policy, the school's philosophy includes the development of a strong education foundation along with a foundation of moral and spiritual attitudes to be a priority for students. The teaching emphasizes skills and concepts enabling the children to continue successfully with their future education. Most students continue in private high schools after graduation, although

some choose public schools for a variety of reasons.

Students at this school are happy and busy. The development of a positive self concept is fostered by the teachers and staff. Teachers have the specific needs of individual students as a priority. There is always time for extra help or attention.

Administrative services at this school begin with the headmaster. He is aided by an assistant headmaster and a head for each of the upper and lower schools. All teachers on the staff hold state teacher certificates. In addition to classroom teachers, special services include a full-time reading teacher for the lower school, and music, art, and physical education teachers for all students. A full-time library media specialist serves all grades. A school chaplain, an ordained clergyman, conducts daily chapel services, teaches religion classes, and is available for counseling. Upper school students may choose to participate in seasonal sports coached by faculty and outside volunteers. During a daily activity period, seventh and eighth grade students may choose from yearbook, literary magazine, and computer.

The Writer

The present responsibilities of the writer are as library media specialist at the school. Her duties include providing reading guidance and library skills instruction, which may include study and research skills. She provides literature enrichment activities ranging from traditional storytelling experiences and small group activities to the Junior Great Books program. Collection development, or the selection of books and audio-visual materials, is an on-going task. Overseeing the budget, daily operations of the library, and coordinating parent volunteers are part of the job. The writer sees each class in grades kindergarten through five once a week. Students in grades six through eight visit the library on an open schedule. Students may visit the

library before and after school, as well as during lunch recess. This year the writer taught the eighth grade literature class in addition to library programs.

The writer holds an undergraduate degree in elementary education and a master's degree in elementary school librarianship. She is certified by the state in elementary education as well as school librarianship. Before working in the school library field, the writer was a teacher of second and third grades. Her library experience has been on a district level working with curriculum materials as well as on the building level as an elementary media specialist. Recently the writer was the librarian at a small inner city school. Her programs emphasized individual attention to readers and positive experiences with books. Books and reading were constantly promoted. Using a variety of strategies, the writer worked to motivate the students to read and develop positive attitudes toward books and reading.

CHAPTER II

STUDY OF THE PROBLEM

Problem Description

Most eighth-graders at the writer's school are from supportive home back grounds and are eager to learn. They have positive attitudes toward reading and are capable of managing the learning processes that are necessary for success in the content areas of instruction. As a group and as individuals, they are oriented toward the kind of academic achievement that will result in placement at the high schools of their choice. However, a small group of eighth-graders, despite parental support and teacher guidance, had a negative attitude toward reading. Reading in the content areas of literature and social studies was especially disliked. Social studies for the eighth grade year is American history, taught from a text that is used in the tenth grade in public school. These particular students had trouble comprehending the content of this text. An English teacher observed that these students were not successful with vocabulary exercises. She attributed this lack of success to the students not having a "sense of the language." They did not like words by themselves, nor do they like them combined into sentences. Apparently these students found reading so unpleasant that they did not want to read for any reason. They did not read to complete assignments.

Coupled with their dislike of reading was an apparent lack of success in controlling their own learning processes. Most of these students appeared disorganized and unfocused in their daily work.

This small group of eighth-graders was placed in a literature class this year

while the rest of the eighth-graders studied Spanish or Latin. Teachers recommended placement in another year of literature based on observation of reading achievement test scores and lack of control over their learning processes. The teachers agreed that success and achievement in reading would predict success in learning a second language.

If the negative attitudes toward reading held by these students were modified, they would become more independent readers. They would experience success in reading in the content areas, being able to monitor and control their own learning processes. These students would show an increased interest in reading and would even choose to read for recreation.

The problem was that a small number of eighth-grade students, despite generally supportive home back grounds, had negative attitudes toward reading and lacked the independent control over their learning processes that is necessary for success in content subject areas.

Evidence

Students are given the achievement tests of the Educational Records Bureau (ERB) in the spring of each school year. Scores on subtests in vocabulary, reading comprehension, and English expression were examined for this group of eight students who were placed in the literature class. On the vocabulary test, percentile scores ranged from the low of 10 to a high of 62. The median percentile score for this group of eight was 35.2%. Stanines ranged from the low of two to a high of six, with the mean stanine at four. For the whole eighth grade, the median percentile was 94.

Another test was given in reading comprehension where the median percentile of the eight students was 36.8, with percentile scores ranging from a low of 21 to a

high of 52. The median score for the whole grade was 85%.

A test of English expression revealed that percentile scores for the eight students ranged from a low of 20 to a high of 67, with the median score at 37%. The median score for the whole eighth grade was 85%.

This small group of students had percentile test scores well below the rest of their classmates on the subtests of vocabulary, reading comprehension, and English expression. Stanine scores under five were also a consideration in placement in this class. The median stanine score for the vocabulary test was four and 4.3 on each of the reading comprehension and English expression tests. The teachers who made the decision to place these eight students in a literature class agreed that these scores were evidence that further work in reading was needed.

Seven of the eight members of the literature class have received diagnostic testing and tutoring in reading from agencies outside the school. Five have spent some time with the lower school reading specialist. The fact that these students find reading difficult enough to have had outside help may contribute to negative attitudes toward reading.

An interview with the head of the English department (see Appendix A) revealed some additional information about these students. When asked what factors determined their placement in a literature class, she discussed the ERB scores as previously mentioned. In addition, she mentioned that teacher recommendations are considered. An English department meeting was held at which each child's placement into Latin, Spanish or literature was considered. The parents were contacted and informed of reasons that the students had been placed in the literature class.

The chairman of the department characterized this group of children as those

students for whom reading is so difficult that they hated it and did not want to read. She described them as not "having a sense of the language."

As further evidence of reluctance to read or negative attitudes toward reading, these students did not voluntarily check out books from the school library. During the previous school year, the number of books checked out ranged from one to four. The mean number of books checked out was two. Since there was incomplete data on all eighth graders' previous number of books checked out, there could be no real comparison and the evidence became circumstantial. Library attendance is voluntary in the upper school, so these students probably did not visit the library very often.

Causes Of The Problem

Negative attitudes toward reading can develop in students for a variety of reasons. The students in the eight-grade literature class had low scores on the reading sub-tests in the ERB achievement battery which indicates that they may have had some problems with reading fluency and comprehension. Difficulties with fluency and comprehension could lead to negative attitudes toward writing.

These students could have been forced to read material beyond their interests and abilities and have experienced considerable frustration while reading. Since the curriculum at this school is academically challenging, same or like materials are often assigned at an earlier grade level than in the public school system. Negative attitudes toward reading can develop if students experience frustration with these materials.

Students in this class were not able to monitor and control their learning processes independent of the teacher. This appearance of confusion and disorganization can lead to negative attitudes toward reading.

Lack of self-esteem can contribute to lack of success in reading, which in turn,

leads to negative attitudes toward reading. Each of the students in this group seemed to have a degree of low self-esteem evident in class discussions and their individual perceptions about ability to succeed in their literature class.

Negative attitudes toward reading can develop when students cannot identify a purpose for reading. One class member is involved in a sports training program that takes two to three hours of practice every day. He read only to complete homework. Most of these students did not see a need to read.

Parents can contribute to the students' negative attitudes. Perhaps some parents do not provide positive models of successful reading behavior. Students may not see books, magazines, or newspapers in their homes or adults reading them. Parents may put strong pressure on these students to achieve rather than recognizing and accepting limits on students' reading abilities.

Literature Review

A survey of recent literature revealed discussions of adolescents as readers and learners and motivation for reading and learning. Much has been written on students attitudes toward reading - how they can be identified and modified. The role of parents and teachers has been identified and discussed.

The reader is reminded that by adolescence most readers are capable of reading independently (Reed, 1988). The peak of reading interest may often occur around age 12. Teenagers often read to find answers to social concerns and questions. But this is also the time when many readers stop reading. Donelson & Nilsen (1989) present a more complete discussion of adolescent developmental psychology, including a discussion of certain developmental tasks which are then related to teenagers as readers or non-readers. Stating that attitudes toward reading seem to influence how

much and how well children read, Alexander & Filler (1975) looked for ways to understand how attitudes affect reading and for strategies for dealing with attitudes. A brief review showed that a number of variables including achievement, self-concept, parents, teachers, instructional practices, sex, test intelligence, socioeconomic status, and student interest are associated with attitudes toward reading. Several types of assessment techniques were discussed and a note of caution added about students sometimes responding in the way they think they should feel rather than how they actually feel. Since attitudes may be highly specific to students and environments, there will be no programs or strategies which will work in all situations.

Believing that negative attitudes toward reading must be changed before growth in reading can take place, Howard (1988) reports on a summer program for 75 poor readers. The program, held in an informal atmosphere, emphasized oral language, children's literature, reading, and writing activities with attractive incentives. Evidence indicates that this approach was successful. Student attitudes changed from largely negative to positive and students were reading more at the end of the program. Teachers discovered that their own attitudes were modified when it became apparent that the creative teaching methods were successful. The writer listed ten useful considerations which he feels must be recognized when planning a program for the improvement of reading attitudes and abilities of poor readers. The program should be different from a traditional skills-focused approach. It should be structured to address the usually negative attitudes found among poor readers. The program should help students experience a broad range of good literature. The reading experiences should help poor students build background experiences. Students will gain confidence when given opportunities for telling orally about what has been read. Carefully planned

writing experiences (not too many or placed too early in the program) will help in overall language growth. Skills should be taught as the need arises. In addition, the classroom structure should be flexible and adaptable to a variety of activities. Finally, creative reading incentive programs and positive feed back from teachers will help stimulate poor readers and are a must for a successful program.

Carlsen & Sherrill (1988) reported finding that some students become concerned with their reading abilities. They became preoccupied with their seeming deficiencies such as reading slowly or failing to remember small details which in turn led to negative attitudes toward reading as well as toward themselves. Other conditions that led to negative attitudes toward reading included traumatic learning experiences in reading groups and with libraries and librarians. The issue of assigning reading materials at an inappropriate age caused great dislike of reading as did book reports, the intensive study of a single work by a whole class, and the emphasis on the search for meaning in a literary work.

As a result of many interviews, Carlsen & Sherrill also discovered conditions that promoted positive attitudes toward reading which included the availability of books and magazines, family members who read aloud, and other adults and peers who read and value reading. Many who had positive attitudes toward reading told of the pride and excitement in owning books. The availability of libraries and the freedom to choose reading materials were also described as positive influences on reading attitudes.

Teacher attitude toward reading apparently has a great influence on student attitude. In a recent survey (Heathington & Alexander, 1984) teachers indicated great importance in fostering children's positive attitudes toward reading. However, they did

not spend much class time focused on developing those attitudes. The teacher's role in the literacy process is described as environmental by Loughlin & Martin (1987). Teachers should model positive reading behaviors in their varied use of books, their interaction with the children about books and reading, and in the creation of an environment that encourages involvement with books. Perez (1986) states that the teacher is the most important factor in motivating children to read for pleasure through his enthusiasm and appreciation of literature. Teachers who model what a reader who enjoys reading does will create positive attitudes toward reading. Repeating what others have noted about the importance of the teacher in creating positive attitudes, May (1986) calls for the active involvement of parents as well. Vaughn & Estes (1986) agree that the classroom teacher has a greater effect on student attitudes toward reading and learning than anything else in school.

Students attitudes toward reading can greatly affect their reading achievement (May), (Vaughn & Estes), (Alexander & Miller). Many studies have been done looking for a significant relationship between achievement and attitudes. Students who have a good attitude toward reading will be likely to achieve well in that subject.

Since student attitude is closely related to student reading achievement, teachers need to be aware of some ways to assess those attitudes. The most direct method would be teacher observation over time (Alexander & Filler, 1976), but time constraints make this approach rather impractical. A less time consuming, yet direct method of attitude assessment would be the use of paper and pencil tools. Tullock-Rhody & Alexander (1980) present a brief scale designed to be used in a pre-and post-test situation. Positive and negative statements about reading are rated by the students. Another scale which would be useful to the writer is the Estes Attitude Scale (Estes,

1971) (Vaughn & Estes, 1986). Statements such as, "Books are a bore.". "Reading is a good way to spend time.", and "There are many books I hope to read." are rated on a scale from one to five. When used in October and again in May, the scores can be compared to see if changes have occurred.

Stress as a factor in reading difficulties and the consequent negative attitudes toward reading has been explored by Gentile & McMillan (1987). The distinctive stress patterns of fight or flight are described in terms of reading behaviors. Many of these descriptors can be applied to students who hold negative attitudes toward reading.

Lack of motivation for reading whether because of reading problems or for other reasons certainly is related to attitudes toward reading. Briggs (1986) reflects on the problem of motivation in the area of reading. Sometimes it may be caused by lack of interest in the material or it may be caused by lack of skills required to read the material. Important in considering adolescents is the idea that they need to learn to take control of their thinking processes and become independent learners (Stone, 1984). Learners became active instead of apathetic when Helmstetter (1987) helped students identify their attitudes and plan what to do to change them. Criscuolo (1988) concludes that there are too many students in middle schools who do not like to read. Although research show that attitudes toward reading are quite difficult to change after age nine or ten, students can change from feelings of apathy to enthusiasm.

Writing about the need to understand the adolescent from a developmental point of view, Donelson (1989) reviews the developmental tasks identified by Robert J. Havighurst a generation ago. Adolescents are busy acquiring more mature social skills while attempting to achieve their masculine or feminine sex role. Physical changes are occurring in their bodies which they are learning to accept. They are achieving

emotional independence from parents and other adults and at the same time preparing for sex, marriage, and parenthood. Preparing for an occupation, developing personal and ethical standards and gaining a place in a larger community are other tasks that adolescents work through. The reader is reminded of the work of Erik H. Erikson and James Marcia and the stages or type of identity that adolescents may adopt. Some psychologists feel that the main developmental task of adolescence is the achieving of an identity. Knowledge of adolescent psychology will help teachers understand the reading needs of young people. Teachers can promote positive attitudes toward reading by discussing books with students from the students' viewpoints.

In surveying the literature for information on causes of negative attitudes toward reading, it was helpful to review some of the developmental tasks faced by adolescents. Much information is available about attitudes and the variety of variables which affect them. The related area of motivation provided a look at the problem from another point of view. Adolescents may have negative attitudes ranging from reading problems to peer pressure to lack of positive motivation. A further examination of the literature will be used to support a plan of action to modify the negative attitudes toward reading in members of the eight-grade literature class.

CHAPTER THREE

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION INSTRUMENTS

Goals

Experiencing success with reading is necessary if negative attitudes toward reading are to be modified. Therefore, the first goal of this practicum was that members of the eighth-grade literature class will have regular opportunities for success-experiences in reading. Since reading for enjoyment usually means having a positive attitude toward reading, a second goal for this practicum was that members of the eighth-grade reading class will enjoy reading this year. If these two goals were attained, the negative attitudes toward reading held by these students would be modified.

Behavioral Expectations

Three specific objectives were drawn from the goals for this practicum. The first involves students obtaining materials to read. The next two deal with student use of reading materials.

1. Given a regular weekly time to visit the school library, students will check out books for recreational reading.

2. Using a variety of strategies available for independent control of learning processes, students will be able to read their history texts with understanding.

3. Given recreational and/or content area reading material, students will read independently during each literature class period.

Standards of Performance

The following standards of performance were to be used to measure behavioral expectations.

1. Each student will visit the library at least once a week during the school year and show a 20% increase over the number of books checked out during the previous school year.

2. By the end of the school year, using independent strategies for learning, students will show a 20% increase in achievement scores and test grades in history.

3. By the end of the school year, students will choose to read content area texts or novels of novels of their choice independently for 25 minutes during four class periods each week.

4. Students will achieve a 20% increase in their score on the Estes Attitude Scale from the beginning to the end of the program.

Measurement of Objectives

The following assessment instruments were to be used to measure the standards of performance.

1. Each student's library card will show the number of library books checked out during the school year.

2. Test grades in history through the school year and scores on the spring achievement tests will show gains made by the students.

3. Time spent in daily independent reading will be noted by the literature teacher and by each student. Increases will be evident.

4. The Estes Attitude Scale will be administered in the fall and again in the spring. Spring and fall scores will be compared.

A journal was kept to record events occurring during the implementation of this practicum. Daily information as well as unexpected events were recorded.

CHAPTER FOUR

SOLUTION STRATEGY

Discussion and Evaluation of Possible Solutions

The literature offered a variety of solutions for motivating reluctant readers and modifying their negative attitudes toward reading. Suggestions ranged from very practical classroom modifications and additions to the complete restructuring of teaching reading in the middle grades.

Since a middle-school grade-level reading class may include students with a variety of needs, it should have an atmosphere where students feel secure and able to share their reading interests with the teacher and other students (Barmose & Morse, 1979). Reading interest centers are recommended which contain items of high interest to students such as sports, hobbies, catalogs, and everyday materials like telephone books, and television guides. Task cards can be constructed to provide activities. It is suggested that materials cover about six reading levels, reflecting a wide range of interests. Since the class met in the school library, the design of the interest centers would have had to be portable, and could be packed up at the end of class.

The use of an attitude survey and an interest inventory with the students is recommended as a way to determine the kinds of materials and activities the students need. Certainly the attitude survey and interest inventory was a logical first step for the writer to take with her students. The results provided some insight into the depth or degree of their negative feelings and some idea of interests on which to build their reading program. Further discussion of the survey will continue in the Results of Action Taken section of this chapter.

Purposeful strategies to use in the classroom are described by Shuman (1982). The interest survey is recommended followed by the use of a reading log where students keep track of all their reading activities for a given period of time. The results of these information gathering tools will help the teacher provide a wide variety of reading activities. The classroom should have an area set aside and fully stocked as a reading area. Ideas for using tape cassette players are suggested for increasing reading speed. The creation of practical assignments is encouraged. Students will read well when seeking information for a specific purpose. They also may use other skills in writing or in mathematics if activities are based on a catalog order, modifying a recipe, or taking a trip, for example. The use of comic books and student writing is encouraged. The emphasis on the practical uses of reading using a wide variety of materials based on students' interests was very appealing to the writer. It was possible to administer an interest survey to the members of the literature class and use the results to plan a variety of activities. Use of the cassette tape recorder and headphones was possible in this setting, but these students might be embarrassed to read onto a tape. Comic books are discouraged in this setting. The most useful idea was that of creating purposeful assignments.

Interactive fiction, stories on computer in which players must complete a quest, has been suggested as a source of new motivation and interest for students who have lost interest in reading. Lancy & Hayes (1988) propose that classrooms have computers and some time each day be spent on the fiction programs. They explain how to carry out a computer-based program. Students need to read and write with understanding to be able to complete the quests. It was the authors' impression that those who were the least enthusiastic about reading often became the most enthusiastic

about the computers. Students at the writer's school would have been enthusiastic users of interactive fiction programs. They had all been exposed to computers in earlier grades and each had a computer course this year. All the computers are in a computer lab setting which was not readily available. It might have been possible for the writer to arrange for occasional extra visits to the lab during class. However, as a year long solution, the use of computers was just not possible.

A psychoeducational technique called "Be The Focus" was developed by Gold & Yellin (1982) to encourage reading success in the content areas. Small groups are formed for discussion where each student is given an opportunity to express an opinion. Maximum student participation is possible with this technique. During the pre-reading discussion, purposes for reading are established. Each student takes a two-minute turn being the speaker or focus person. Small groups report their summary results to the whole class. After the silent reading period, students discuss for recall of facts and concepts. This could be an effective technique for breaking the cycle in classroom discussion where a few students seem to dominate, leaving others feeling reluctant to share their views. If well managed by the teacher, other students could gain self-confidence in their abilities to express their opinions and increase the reasons for reading. The writer's group was small and, although not always eager to read, they were always willing to discuss. Everyone seemed able to express his or her opinion freely. This technique could be useful as a change of pace or perhaps when working with the history text, but was not a first choice for a long-range solution to changing reading attitudes.

Farr (1981) states that lack of interest may be the greatest cause of failure to learn. She presents the language experience approach as it can be used at the junior

high level. Students and teachers generate ideas for themes around which practical reading experiences are then developed. The emphasis is placed on student interests within the study area rather than reading ability activities. Students will gain great amounts of background information and be interested in a topic which they have generated. The writer has experienced success using language experience activities with younger children and knows that it can generate interest in nearly every student. It could become an alternative to the student-dreaded literature anthology. If a unit were developed on television, for example, activities could include finding the original book versions of novels adapted for the video screen and comparing the written to the video version. The eighth-grade students could generate a wealth of topics for units. They would be reading voluntarily in areas of interest to them. A version of this language experience technique was a strong possibility for use with the eighth-grade literature class.

Another method of making reading necessary and interesting for students has been practiced by Arnoldsen (1982). Using hundreds of library books and a text for reference, he teaches by asking the questions first and not at the end of the chapter. Arnoldsen describes a class who became engrossed in a student parking decision and ended up learning a great deal more about the democratic process and the American Revolution than could possibly be gained from their text books. This seems to build on the language experience approach, using real life happenings to generate the need to read for solutions. This approach was overly-ambitious for the eighth-grade literature class. However, some of the practical hints such as enlisting the help of the school librarian, would be helpful if a smaller scale version of this plan were to be put into action.

Recognizing adolescents' need to begin to understand and participate in reality, Atwell (1987) states that junior high teaching should feature independent activities. Students should have more responsibility for their own learning. Atwell's areas in particular are writing and reading. Through her years of experience, she has developed a workshop format where students talk about their ideas and read or write. The lesson at the beginning of each session is the place where a genre, reading processes, or how authors have come to write may be discussed. The rest of the period is set aside for independent reading of books the students have chosen. Students and teacher communicate through letters exchanged in a dialogue journal.

Allowing students to choose their own books affects their attitudes toward reading and their abilities as readers. This brief discussion of Atwell's compelling book does not begin to communicate the success and excitement for learning and teaching evident in her work. A replication or adaptation of the workshop format was readily possible with the writer's eighth-graders. They needed a literature-based, creative approach for their course that would result in improved attitudes toward reading and also help them become more independent in their use of learning strategies.

Description and Justification for Solution Selected

After considering a variety of approaches suggested by the literature offering plans for improving attitudes toward reading, the writer selected the work of Atwell as the approach to take with the eighth-grade literature class. These students had a negative attitude toward reading and lacked the independent control over their learning processes that is necessary for success in content subject areas. To modify their negative attitudes toward reading and provide strategies for gaining control over

their learning processes, the students participated in a literature workshop.

Report of Action Taken

The workshop format was chosen for this literature class based on the results Atwell (1987) recorded in her book, In The Middle. It was successful in this writer's setting because it provided a creative approach that is literature based, yet fit into the traditional academic atmosphere of this school.

The actual format of each workshop or class session fit well with the setting of the class - the school library - and with the amount of time available for each session. The class met four days each week for 50 minutes each day. The plan consisted of a directed group mini-lesson lasting from five to ten minutes, a silent reading time of up to 30 minutes (the teacher reading also), and a few minutes of evaluation with the whole group at the end of the period. Students used reading time as writing time as well. Each student wrote letters to the teacher about his or her reading in a dialogue journal which will be discussed later.

Topics covered by the mini-lessons were varied and essentially developed as the class progressed. Early sessions covered class format, expectations, and rules. (See Appendix B). These were followed by discussions about the dialogue journal - how to make entries and what to write about. Samples of Atwell's eighth-grade entries were read and discussed. The results of an informal survey of reading interest gave students ideas for book selection.

Students and teacher discussed colorful language as reflected in The Red Badge of Courage (Crane, 1979). This book had been on the summer reading list and was reviewed in their English Class early in the first quarter. The additional time to look back over the story a little more slowly helped the students clarify and identify

significant passages. The novel To Kill a Mockingbird (Lee, 1960) was read in English class during the fourth quarter. Several mini-lessons evolved from this reading particularly about character development. From these presentations, students gained ideas for looking at their current reading and journal entries.

Throughout the school year time was taken to read from Scope, a Scholastic weekly magazine of interest to middle schoolers. Nearly every issue contained a play and the students enjoyed reading it aloud. At times the play was a condensed version of the script for one of the ABC Afterschool Specials which the students liked to watch. The videotapes for two of these were watched in class, followed by lively discussions. The video of "A Town's Revenge" was helpful in its use of the flashback technique which was confusing to students in the written form.

A variety of reading strategies such as skimming, scanning, and finding the main idea were presented by the teacher as a result of individual conferences with the students to help them gain control of reading in other text materials, especially history. Newsweek magazine and the history text were used for these presentations. In the fall, one or two mini-sessions were spent on history material before an exam.

Another sequence of mini-lessons was involved with selection of appropriate materials and how to read aloud to preschoolers in preparation for four class visits to an early childhood development center. Students read their selections aloud to the teacher and to a partner for timing and practice.

All eighth-graders attending this school write an extensive research paper during the third quarter of the year. Although the main presentations about the project were made through English and American history classes, the literature class mini-lessons covered additional work on topic selection, writing a thesis statement, and using

materials from more than one source.

An assortment of other topics such as selecting books for the book fair that eighth-graders would enjoy, discussing their favorite and least favorite books, identifying their best or favorite journal entries, and other theme and genre topics related to student reading rounded out the mini-lessons. A list of topics covered may be found in Appendix C.

During the period of silent reading, which lasted from 20 to 30 minutes, students and teacher read from a range of materials. They chose novels, plays, and short stories. One student read about his favorite subject, World War II. Students were responsible for having reading materials in their possession when class began. They were curious and wondered why the teacher was reading at first, but quickly came to the point of asking what she had chosen to see if they might enjoy it and to recommend titles to her. Sometimes students used a few minutes from this reading time to make their journal entries.

Students were required to keep a dialogue journal. Entries were in the form of a letter to the teacher about the students' reading. Two entries were required each week unless it was a short week where the class met fewer than four times. The teacher answered each letter and returned the journal by the next class meeting. Some of the mini-lessons covered the process of writing in a dialogue journal and others dealt with theme and genre material so students could avoid the plot summary yet have guidelines for other ways to respond to their reading. Letters were not graded for mechanics but for frequency and depth of response.

The brief re-grouping at the end of each period was used for positive feedback on reading behavior, reminders of assignments, and other assorted comments. It was a

way of summing up the period's activities and bringing them to closure that was particularly helpful to these students who tended to be scattered and disorganized in thought and behavior.

Evaluation of students' work was accomplished in three parts. A daily grade was given for following class rules and class behavior. Each student began the day with the maximum number of points and deductions were made if necessary. Journals were given a quarterly grade based on frequency of entry and depth of response. Individual conferences were held near the end of the quarter to evaluate progress toward personal reading goals and revise or set new goals for the next quarter. The quarter's letter grade was an average of daily grade, journal grade, and personal goals grade. As a means of looking at their attitudes toward reading, students completed the Estes Reading Attitude Survey in October and again in May. They compared scores and noticed the changes. Letter grades were not considered for this survey.

A mid-term and final exam were required to be given by the school. The first part of each exam consisted of a period (twenty minutes) of reading in the students' own books and responding to that reading with a letter to the teacher in their journals just as they would normally do. The second part of each exam consisted of questions about how authors write which students could answer by using material in their journals. The final exam contained an evaluation form for the class (See Appendix D).

Two opportunities arose for these students to make a reading connection outside of the classroom. The first occurred in November when members of the literature class were invited to read once a week for four weeks to preschoolers at an inner-city early childhood development center. For most of the class it was a first experience with the inner-city as well as preschoolers. Students were nervous about

the experience in spite of much practice reading their books aloud. By the end of the fourth visit, the readers had all gained confidence in their abilities to read aloud and gained self-esteem through being wanted and appreciated by preschoolers. It was an experience of mutual joy and would have continued except for changes in sports schedules and afterschool activities of the readers. Since the preschoolers napped after lunch, the reading visits had to be made from 3:00 to 4:00 resulting in difficult schedules.

The other opportunity arose in April when the students were asked to suggest additional titles that eighth-graders might enjoy to be included in the spring book fair. Titles were suggested and the catalogs from the local paperback book distributor were studied during several mini-lessons. A trip was taken to the paperback warehouse to choose the titles. Students could also purchase paperbacks of their own. Several bought books to read during class for the rest of the year. This was another positive connection with reading.

The literature workshop design was new to these students and the teacher. There was some initial hesitancy on the part of the students who were expecting a more traditional class design with assigned readings and regular tests. It soon became clear for these students who lacked independent control of their learning processes and had negative attitudes toward reading that literature class was a high point in their day.

CHAPTER FIVE

RESULTS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite generally supportive home backgrounds, a small number of eighth-grade students had negative attitudes toward reading and lacked the independent control over their learning processes that is necessary for reading success in content subject areas. These eight students were placed in a literature class while the rest of the eighth-graders studied Spanish or Latin. Their teachers agreed that these students lacked the control over their learning processes and had low reading achievement test scores which might prevent them from success in learning a second language.

As a result of evidence collected about these students and an examination of the literature, two goals were established for the eighth-grade literature class and this practicum. The first goal was to provide regular opportunities for successful experiences in reading and the second was that members of the class would enjoy reading this year. These goals were successfully accomplished through the implementation of an individualized reading program conducted in a workshop format.

Results

Of the three specific objectives drawn from the goals, the first was impossible to evaluate. The objective, given a regular weekly time to visit the school library, students will check out books for recreational reading, became irrelevant. The literature class met in the school library which afforded the students access to reading materials on a daily basis. Usually if a student chose a book from the library, it was a paperback. They were circulated informally without students' cards recording a date due. If students chose hard-backs from the collection, they usually by-passed the

circulation system and kept the book on a special shelf reserved for the literature class. Students used the library for science projects and a history research paper, but their visits outside of literature class were few and not for recreational reading material. Often they brought books from home for literature class. Older brothers and sisters were sources for popular titles. Paperback was the preferred format. So library circulation statistics did not help as a measure of increased reading. However, meeting in the library provided a positive, book-filled atmosphere so that finding a book was never a problem.

The second objective, using a variety of strategies available for independent control of learning processes, students will be able to read their history texts with understanding, was partially fulfilled. Students gained confidence in handling history text material which was not reflected by test scores.

During the first semester of the year, two mini-lessons and usually a whole class period were set aside for history. Topics were discussed and facts reviewed for test preparation. Students brought their text books to class to work on difficult passages. That the literature class met only four times weekly was a problem for reviewing history. There were frequent Friday holidays when the class did not meet so the times of reading history together were sometimes distant from the time of the test. As students grew accustomed to the seminar style of the literature class, they looked forward to the independent reading time and asked that the class spend less time on history and keep the reading time. So it was agreed to not use any further whole class periods for history reading, although it was also agreed that any student who needed to read history during reading time be able to do so. In fact, students did so very seldom, preferring their literature choices. Two of the class members were tutored in

history on a weekly basis. They preferred to read history with their tutors. The last class time spent on history was in December.

During the third quarter of the year all eighth-graders worked on a research paper. The topic was to be related to American history. Several mini-lessons were devoted to clarifying a thesis statement and organizing information from several sources into coherent thoughts. Students worked on these papers during English and history classes as well as during literature. The regular reading assignments in the history text were smaller and fewer tests were given, mainly in the form of quizzes during this time.

Other strategies which students were able to use in history reading were learned and practiced using Newsweek magazine regularly in class during the mini-lesson time. The reading level of the news material was challenging, yet the interest level was very high. Using articles in the magazine, the techniques of skimming and scanning were practiced, as well as summarizing, interpreting facts and finding the main idea. Students enjoyed reading these articles aloud which helped improve fluency.

The variety of strategies presented to students were useful to them in reading their history text material as well as other text material. Students gained confidence in working with the text and as they did, the need for class time to be spent on it grew less. Part of the objective calling for a variety of strategies was fulfilled. Test scores were not used to evaluate this due to the inconsistent way the various strategies were presented and practiced. In addition, the emphasis became less on reading history as a text and developed into learning strategies that would be helpful in reading history as well as other material.

The third objective, given recreational and/or content area reading material, students will read independently during each class period, was fulfilled by each student. The standard of performance called for students to be reading independently for 25 minutes during each class period by the end of the school year.

Students and teacher kept track of the number of minutes read each day. Two students with watches containing timers were timekeepers. Times were written in journals. During the first week that reading time was held every day, an average of 19 minutes per class was spent in reading. It took the group about 5 minutes to settle in and focus on reading. They were easily distracted by movements of students and the occasional visitor to the library. (The library was to be closed during the time of literature class but that was not universally respected.) They became restless again as they anticipated the end of reading time. By the beginning of the second quarter, the average reading time was 24 minutes. Students settled in quickly and eagerly, although most were still easily distracted. In the first week of the third quarter, the average reading time was 23 minutes. Students' concentration had improved greatly. Some still were distracted by visitors to the library. Others were engrossed in their books and could continue without interruption. Several times during the third quarter, students would read until the bell rang for the end of the period. A final group gathering was not always held at this point. At the beginning of the fourth quarter, reading time had naturally extended to an average of 28 minutes. Students would remind the teacher that they wanted to read if a lesson or discussion was too long. A few reading times extended to 30 minutes. The group preferred to read until the bell rang. On one occasion, a student went to his next class and obtained a pass from the teacher to return to the library to finish his chapter. He found a quiet spot and read

on, in spite of the presence of a second grade class. Increases in reading time were evident and exceeded the standard of performance. Although not measured, but apparent to the teacher and observers was the increase in students' ability to focus on their reading and depth of concentration.

When students began their search for first books, they were reluctant to make independent choices. Each student came to the teacher several times before settling on a title. Most looked for a short, easy book. Sometimes they were eager to drop a book and declare it boring. By the end of the year, the students were making confident choices of books that they liked. Length ceased to be an issue. Students came to terms with the idea of not finishing a book if it did not suit. However, they would always choose a paperback over a hardbound version of the same title.

It seemed that students were the most satisfied by books with real teenagers in them. They wanted to know what others their age would do. The girls chose mysteries, especially if they had elements of the supernatural or horror in them. One boy read adventure after adventure. He especially liked the stories to be about diving and treasure hunting. Another tackled The Hunt for Red October (Clancy, 1984) after seeing the movie. This was the longest book he had ever read. The girls chose many books where the characters solved real life problems with friend, parents, and at school. They discovered the books of Paula Danziger and two of the girls read all of them. The Outsiders (Hinton, 1989), assigned to some students for English class, was eventually read by each member of the literature class. All students read To Kill A Mockingbird (Lee, 1960) which proved to be a favorite for letters in journals and discussions during mini-lessons. Readers' book choices reflected Reed's (1988) description of early adolescents' search for personal identity, to see themselves in the

characters and plots of these books.

During the last week of classes students reviewed the entries on their reading logs and selected their favorite books of the year. They drew up a list in rank order from most favorite to least favorite. Good discussions arose about why students chose their favorites.

The least number of books read was five. This reader kept each book in the library on a shelf in the teacher's office when she was not reading. She never took her book home. The book she was reading at the end of the year was Izzy, Willy Nilly (Voight, 1986), a long, serious portrait of a teen-ager injured in an accident. The writing was complex and filled with long passages descriptive of the main character's feelings. This reader would not have considered this book, nor would she have been able to concentrate on it earlier in the year. The five books completed for this student were a major accomplishment for her. She reported that last year she read no books except assignments in text books.

Two students completed seven and eight books respectively, while four students had nine books on their lists. One student listed 12 books in her log of completed reading. Although students shared some titles, each person's list was different from the others. As a group they preferred stories about real teenager but as individuals some preferred humor, some adventure and some school or social settings as the vehicle for their teenagers' activities. Students were pleased with themselves when they finished each book. They did not compete with others or worry about numbers read. They enjoyed each book completed.

The letters in the dialogue journals were evaluated for frequency and depth of response. A minimum of two entries per week was required unless the class met fewer

than four times. The writer expected that students would resist even the minimum standard, assuming that reluctance to read would carry over into reluctance to write. Yet from the beginning, students wrote regularly in their journals, seldom missing a letter, and seldom having to be reminded to write. They were eager to read the replies and quick to notice if the teacher occasionally missed a letter. Not having to worry abut form allowed students to freely express their thoughts about their reading.

Contents of letters seemed to vary with the discussions and presentations during the mini-lessons (See Appendix C). When mini-lessons dealing with theme and genre topics were presented, students took notes in their journals. As a result, they always had a point of reference to help them write their letters. Students understood that a plot summary was not the same as a response to what they were reading. Two students struggled to understand that concept, but showed improvement.

In September, S. wrote, "It is the subs first day. She tells the class that it is her first time as a sub. The boys said that they ....", a long paragraph of plot summary. In February, he wrote, "I really enjoyed Rock-N-Roll Nights. The author really made it sound real. I hate books that you can see right through and in this book it had its ups and downs but it seems it was mostly downs. I really didn't know if it was going to be a happy ending."

In the fall, T. wrote, "The book I'm reading is really good. So far the first killing has just happened because one of the guys fell into a booby trap." He progressed to being able to look at a character by March. "Jem is my favorite character because he is always taking charge of the situations. He is also very smart in the things he does."

The teacher replied to each letter as a fellow reader. Occasionally, she would

ask a question or make a suggestion if the reader seemed to be lacking direction. Students asked questions in their letters. S. asked, "...When the author wrote this book, how did she get the idea to write about her kids and their experiences...?" A series of mini-lessons were held discussing how authors may develop their ideas. Other readers then had another way in which to think about their current books.

A series of mini-lessons covered the reader's affect. Connections between readers' lives and their books were discussed, as well as how their books made them think and feel. Student letters reflected these discussions. S. (a girl) wrote, "This book Tiger Eyes makes me think a lot about my family and if one of my parents died, how would I react." N. responded with her feelings about the works of an author. "I think I am going to be addicted to Paula Danziger. My feelings toward her books are great. In all of her books I feel as if I am the main character. She makes me feel like I'm part of the story..." N. did go on to read all of Paula Danziger's books.

Although the contents of journal entries were literary in nature, occasionally a real-life problem would be included in a letter. A. began a long letter with a discussion of the characters Romeo and Juliet but ended up describing a peer relationship problem she was working on. "This year is a different story. I have a lot of friends or I think I do, but the real question is why don't they talk to me." In her next letter she thanked me for talking with her and in the next added as a parenthesis, "I found true friends at last." A's journal was a safe place for her to reflect on personal needs during this time.

The dialogue response journal seemed to be the component of the literature class that completed the reading process. Students responses grew in depth as they became aware of many ways to respond to their reading and as they became more

mature in adolescence, in their abilities to handle more abstract thinking. During the final two weeks of class, students reviewed their journals and chose their best letter and one that was weaker to show improvement as another self-evaluation exercise.

The Estes Survey of Reading Attitude was administered in October and again in May. By comparing scores, it was possible to note changes in attitude toward reading. The standard of performance called for a 20% increase in scores. The table below shows the changes in scores.

Table 1

Student Scores on Estes Survey of Reading Attitude

Student	October Score	May Score	Change	%
1	74	88	14	18
2	48	82	34	70
3	72	75	3	4.1
4	49	81	32	65
5	59	67	8	14
6	44	63	19	43
7	86	69	-17	-24
8	61	74	13	21

Four of the students exceeded a 20% gain in scores. Two showed gains of more than 10%. One student made a small gain. The student showing a substantial loss in points became confused while completing the survey in May. She seemed able

to comprehend the directions in October but not in May. She was distressed that her score was lower in May. Confused by the idea of agreeing or disagreeing in a positive or negative way, she had responded to some items in the opposite way that she meant. She completed the survey again after a conference with the teacher but her confusion persisted, so teacher and student evaluated the items together. It was decided that her May score would be only a few points higher than her October score. She had a score of 86, the highest score in the class, and had been consistently interested in her reading throughout the year. A median percentage of change for the whole class was 27.6% which exceeded the goal of a 20% increase. Students were surprised and amazed at the changes in their scores. They were all pleased.

An evaluation form (See Appendix D) was included as the last page in the students' final exam. The first question asked what students liked about the class. One student replied, "I found that I liked reading for myself and not for a grade because I'm learning how to read independently for myself and not for school." Another student "liked to meet her goals" while another discovered that reading is fun. One of the boys liked the time to "just sit down and enjoy a book." Another commented that he felt the small class size made it easier to learn. The magazines, Scope and Newsweek, were the best for another girl.

When asked what they might change about the class, students suggested using magazines as well as books, and adding more time for reading. Two did not want the class to change "...because it is just right" and "I like how it is." One student thought every eighth grader should take this class and one did not respond to the question.

All students indicated that the workshop-style of class was a new way of learning for them. All except one said they would participate in this type of class

again if offered the chance.

When asked to choose their best way of learning, replies were varied but the discussion method rated first for seven of the students. The table below reflects the varied choices.

Table 2

What Do You Think Is Your Best Way Of Learning?

Ranked From Best (1) To Least Effective (6)

Lectures	1,2,3,3,3,3,6	Textbooks	2,2,3,4,4,6
Taking Notes	1,1,2,2,3,5,5	Discussions	1,1,1,1,1,1,4
Workbooks	2,2,2,3,3,5	Films, Videos, Etc.	x
Tests, Quizzes	1,3,4,5,6,6	Other Ways	

Discussion clearly stands out as a best way of learning for these students. They all indicated liking the seminar style of class. Indeed, the mini-lesson portion of the class was very often a lively discussion. The size of the class was suited to maximum participation from each person. These students were the ones who usually did not contribute a great deal in discussions in other classes. In this group, they felt comfortable expressing opinions and asking questions that they might not have risked in larger classes.

A final question asked students for additional comments. Most of the comments were good-byes and humorous remarks but three are shared here.

1. I would like to tell you that this has been my favorite class this year because the class is so small and it is often fun. T., a boy.

2. I would like to tell you that this class was the best class of the year. No test was great and think you learn better by studying on your own. I learned how to not give up and to be able to read faster and also to be able to not get fed up with a book. N., a girl.

3. I would like to thank you for a fun year! I really enjoy reading now and I don't think I would have without this class. S., a boy.

Conclusions

Although two of the three objectives proved to be less useful than predicted, the overall results of the individualized reading and journaling program showed that the goals had been met. These eighth-graders who claimed that they hated reading and would seldom read anything other than school assignments in the fall were asking for more time and more books when the class ended in the spring. Each one of them has a greatly improved attitude toward reading and improved capacity for enjoyment reading. In spite of reading being a source of unsuccessful experiences in the past, the students enjoyed the reading they accomplished during the literature class. They should be able to enter their high school years with an improved, refreshed attitude toward reading. These students will still have to work hard at reading, but each has some new strategies to use and increased confidence in his or her abilities.

The two outside of class experiences which occurred were unexpected, unusual, and each highly successful. Choosing books to read to preschoolers was an acceptable

way for these students to read and enjoy those books which had been favorites of theirs when they were younger. Reading aloud to practice was acceptable and the results benefitted both readers and listeners. The gains in student self-esteem were evident as they talked about "their" preschoolers and made plans for the next visits.

Being asked to help choose books for the book fair was the other unexpected successful event. It happened at a time when the year seemed to be endless and provoked a burst of enthusiasm. The old feelings of incompetence were quickly set aside as they began to discuss titles they would like to have at the fair. The visit to the warehouse to actually select the books was the event that gave students the real ownership of task. They came to believe that it was a meaningful experience and not just another class assignment.

Both activities provided meaningful demonstrations of reading. Dionisio (1989) noted that her work with remedial readers became successful when she provided ways for her students "to construct their own knowledge" by seeing demonstrations of reading that were real. The writer's students had two first-hand experiences that were very different, yet real uses of reading, in addition to those provided by the class structure.

Setting their own personal reading goals was a successful way that students gained more control over their learning. They had been used to being told exactly what had to be accomplished in other classes. The first goals were set with a great deal of guidance and encouragement from the teacher. Later goals were set eagerly and thoughtfully as students found that they could make progress toward attaining those goals. In their work with at-risk readers, Coley & Hoffman (1990), noted that "student self-evaluation placed students squarely at the center of their own learning."

Their students as well as the writer's eighth-graders were helped to gain control over their learning processes and learned to monitor "...their success in achieving learning goals." All began to see themselves as capable of experiencing success with reading.

Success in achieving the goals of this practicum may be attributed to the workshop format adapted for this class based on the work of Atwell (1987). The independent reading, dialogue journals, the two outside activities, and setting of personal reading goals provided students with regular opportunities for reading success.

In work with remedial students, (Dionisio (1989) adapted a form of Atwell's reading workshop in which reading strategies were coupled with book talks and dialogue journals to provide meaningful experiences with reading. Atwell (1989) suggests that teachers who talk with their students will discover what will make meaningful reading experiences for them and will be able to make the reading workshop their own. In the article, "Teachers In The Middle" (1989), nine teachers presented brief reports of their successful adaptation of the workshop format. Frymier, et al. (1989), discussing ways to verify finds of research, noted that "Researchers in education try to design studies carefully; even if similar studies are done in slightly different ways, educational researchers trust that a number of studies of the same problem area will "add-up" over time." This writer believed the same could be said for the results of the problem-solving approach of the practicum process, supported by the previously cited reports of success for this method.

The workshop method works because it takes into account adolescents' needs and is based on sound principles of learning. Social relationships are of first importance during these years and the workshop provides a setting where conversation occurs between students and between students and teacher as well. Atwell (1987)

identified three principles she believes help educators make the best of adolescence. She calls for understanding and accepting the realities of middle school students concurrently, and helping them find ways to channel their energies and social needs in ways that are meaningful. It is important that educators remember that adolescence is still a time of intellectual development, even if the learners "may not be quite so charming in their attempts to learn as their little brothers and sisters." Finally, Atwell calls for junior high teaching to be organized in ways that will allow students to begin to assume more responsibility for their own learning.

Students worked willingly at their reading and writing because they made the choices of reading material and goals for themselves. Glasser (1990) comments that "...the more the work that students are asked to do satisfies their needs, the harder they will work." Because they could choose, students read for all the reasons that readers read. The discovery that they could do the work then led to motivation. Students became excited when they found out things they did not know before about reading and writing. Having power over decisions in this class helped students fulfill that need in part and they worked hard.

The workshop format for the writer's literature class proved to be successful. A quote from Atwell (1987) provides a succinct concluding statement:

> A workshop approach benefits adolescents by affording them the responsibility and autonomy they're ready to begin assuming as they approach adulthood. The workshop uniquely accommodates junior high students' social, physical, and intellectual needs; it provides a structure that keeps them on track, and an authoritative model with whom they can discover the sense of reading and writing.

Recommendations

1. The workshop format can be adapted to a broad range of ages and reading abilities.

2. The teacher should take advantage of unexpected ways to provide positive, real-life experiences with reading as they occur.

3. The replicator might consider including students reading with a younger partner or group as part of the class design.

4. Although the writer read with the students and kept a journal about the class, she would recommend that a replicator keep two journals. One journal would be for the purpose of recording daily anecdotes and observations. The other journal would be for personal responses to his or her own reading which in turn could be shared with students.

5. Letters to students in which the teacher responds as a fellow reader were more successful than when responses sounded like "teacher-talk."

6. Keep the mini-lessons brief. For maximum effectiveness, develop topics from students' needs.

7. Curriculum requirements can be fulfilled through the use of the mini-lessons.

8. The library can provide a positive, book-filled atmosphere for the class if a conference room is available or regular library routines can be suspended during class time.

9. Having the class meet in a regular classroom gives students a more private place for reading with fewer distractions than is afforded by the library.

Plans for Dissemination

The report of this practicum will be shared with the Headmaster, the head of the Upper School, and the Head of the English department. Queries were sent to two reading journals for guidelines for writing the results as a journal article. The writer offered to share this project as a future in-service day held by the local association of private schools, and will gladly share it with any interested persons.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW WITH THE HEAD OF THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT

Interview with the Head of the English Department

1. What factors were considered in placing students in the eighth grade literature class?

2. What is your definition of the reluctant readers in this class?

3. How can negative attitudes toward reading be modified?

4. What other content areas have a great deal of reading? What kind of texts are used in these classes?

APPENDIX B

CLASS GUIDELINES

Dear Readers,

Your notebook is a place for you and me to talk about books, reading, authors, and writing this year. You'll be commenting on literature in letters to me; I'll write letters back to you. All of our letters will stay here together, arranged chronologically, as a record of the thinking, learning, and reading we did together.

In your letters talk about what you've read: tell what you noticed; what you liked and didn't and why; how you read and why. Tell what these books said and meant to you. You can ask questions or for help.

As a minimum for passing this course you need to write at least two letters a week in your notebook. You may write as often as you like! If class meets fewer than four times, you'll need to write only one letter.

When you write to me, put your notebook in the green box which is on my desk. Leave it there most of the time, unless you plan to write in it. Yes, you may write a letter during reading time, as well as outside of class.

Please date your letters in the upper right-hand corner. Mention the title of the book you are talking about and capitalize and underline the title of the books to which you make reference (for example, Tiger Eyes or The Hobbit).

Finally, enter the title and author of each book you finish this year in the reading log section in the back of your notebook.

Your collection of letters will provide one third of your grade in literature. Follow the procedures outlined above, write often and about your thoughts on literature with care and concern, and you'll do well.

I'm looking forward to your letters. I can't wait to learn from you, learn with you, and help you learn more.

Your Teacher,

Adapted from Atwell (1987). (p. 193).

RULES FOR EIGHTH GRADE LITERATURE CLASS

1. Students must read for the entire time period assigned each day.
2. You may write a letter in your journal during reading time.
3. You must read a book, preferably one that tells a story. Novels, histories and biographies are good choices, but we can negotiate.
4. You must have a book in your possession when class begins. Since we meet in the library, this will never be a problem.
5. Students may not talk to or disturb others during reading time.
6. You may sit wherever you like for reading time as long as Rule 5 is kept.
7. A student who is absent can make up time and points by reading at home or during study hall with a note from the study hall teacher or parent. He or she may read after school with Mrs. Johnston. That time must be arranged.

APPENDIX C

MINI-LESSON TOPICS

Mini-Lesson Topics

Orientation to Seminar
Class expectations and rules
How to set up a dialogue journal
Samples of letters from other eighth-graders
Informal reading interest survey

Book Selection
Read from beginning, middle, and end
Hardbacks or paperbacks?
Permission not to finish an unliked book
What does boring really mean?
Eighth-graders' interests
Favorite authors - who they are, how to find them in the library and in a bookstore

Reading strategies
Skimming
Scanning
Main idea
Drawing conclusions
Topic sentence
How to read a newsmagazine
(Newsweek)
Scope
History text book

Writing
Thesis statements
Parts of a letter
Samples of good letters
Using material from several sources

Reading Stories to Preschoolers
Selecting appropriate books
Picture books-Reading aloud-techniques
Practice

To Kill A Mockingbird
Characters
Setting
Comparison with life today

Red Badge of Courage
Colorful language
Plot
Narrative

Reader's Affect
How the book made you feel
How the book made you think
Connections between your book and your own life
What you liked or didn't like about your book
Best and worst aspects of a book

Character Development
Actions, thoughts, and feelings
Believable characters
Main characters

About Books
Topics
Dialogue
Descriptions and details
Humor
Setting
Title
Length
Realism
Suspense
Action
Theme
Plot
Narration

Book Fair
Reading interests of eighth-graders
Where do books come from?
Making sense of catalogs
Selecting appropriate titles

APPENDIX D

STUDENT EVALUATION

STUDENT EVALUATION FORM

1. What did you like about this class?

2. If I could change something about the class, it would be:

3. Was the seminar-style class a new way of learning for you? ____yes____no

4. Would you like to participate in this type of class again? ____yes____no

5. Which do you think is your best way of learning?

___Lectures ___Text books

___Taking notes ___Discussions

___Workbooks ___Films, videos, etc.

___Tests, quizzes ___Other ways - write them here:

6. What else would you like to tell me?